MILKING BLACK BULL

11 GAY BLACK POETS

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Alden Reimonenq
Robert E. Penn, Jr.
Jim Murrell
Bob McNeil
Brad Johnson
Redvers JeanMarie
G. Winston James
Umar Hasan
Thomas Grimes
Thomas Glave
Thom Bean

Conceived by Assotto Saint
Edited by Vega Press

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Assotto Saint
Winter of 1993

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In loving memory of fellow poets:

Melvin Dixon
Roy Gonsalves
Don Reid
Marlon Riggs
Craig Reynolds
Umar Hasan

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INTRODUCTION

A writer, performer, AIDS activist, friend, lover, and son, Assotto Saint was 'all of that', and much more! I read his early works and was moved by the lack of fear in his writing. I envied the exotic tones in which he expressed his innermost feelings. I remember when I first saw him, reading poetry at Tracks in New York, sponsored by Other Countries. I waited in anticipation. He finally arrived, dressed in a red & black striped, tube dress, red pumps and full makeup. He was an exotic bird, a breath of fresh air, he was . . . wonderful.

He soon became my friend and mentor as we both tried to establish gay black publishing houses to provide an avenue for the works of gay black men. His experience in the gay community and his status as the reigning 'diva of poetry' helped guide me and give me strength. There was never a sense of competition, as one might expect, but brotherhood, as I took a different path by incorporating photography and illustration in most of my work.

The comfort and advise I should have received from a lover, I received from Assotto over the years, during good and bad times. I would personally like to dedicate this anthology, to him, Yves Francois Lubin.

This anthology represents the work of some of our brightest talents. I would like to pay tribute to them and thank the individual poets for sharing their work. I would also like to acknowledge the untimely death of poet, Umar Hassan, whose work appears in this anthology.

In conclusion, it was only through the belief and help from Michele Karlsberg and Walter Holland that I was able to fulfill Assotto's dream for the publication of this anthology.

Vega
November , 1994
New Jersey

MILKING BLACK BULL

11 GAY BLACK POETS

Alden Reimonenq

Hoodoo Headrag

Dedicated to Darrick DeWitt Lackey

Alden Reimonenq was born on April 4, 1952, grew up in New Orleans, and now lives in Oakland. He is a Professor of English at St. Mary's College of California, teaching Shakespeare and African American literature. His poetry, fiction, reviews, and essays have appeared in *MELUS (Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States), The James White Review, African American Review, Alura, Poet, Changing Men, The Journal of Homosexuality, Berkeley Poetry Review,* and the collection ***Gents, Bad Boys & Barbarians: New Gay Male Poetry*** (Alyson Publications).

Black Male Cocoons

When a Black man encysts
the life of his man,
a peculiar love thing is
born, borne, and bound.

It lives inside
a potholed chrysalis
with a swarthy complexion.
Its build has a delicate,
curvy muscularity
and a rough bulginess.

Inside, there is
the queerest smoothness
that feels like
El Niño breezes.
No center holds it;
its own
slippery adhesive.

Black men create
this love thing:
a fated argosy
prorogued by words.

Headrag

If spring and hens had never yoked,
Pop and I would never wear headrags.

Pop's was a lotioned blackness
standing three heads higher
than my top overall buckles.
The farm hands pegged him "all boy"
and shrugged at "citified" me.
We paired, though, as hens and spring do;
our farm chores, an excuse.

This particular spring, the hens
stole nests in the best boy places:

> inside the rusty '54 Chevy fender;
> in a half-buried tire flanking the barn;
> underneath doghouse roofs ripped by Betsy's winds;
> and in every safe corner the barn offered.

Finding nests hid us from Pop's folks --
nigh impossible on a chicken-and-pig farm.

When the old Rhode Island red surfaced with bitties,
the farm bubbled with tweeting chicks --
tiny commodities to collect, count, and cage.
Pop was my foreman; his directions sweet.
We saved the barn for last, by his design,
and hunted the fields with tie-wire jails
to strip away the brood of shrieking hens.
Chicks danced gingerly in Pop's huge mitts;
I envied them his attention and caution.

With near four hundred caged bitties stacked,
we headed for the barn, tongues hanging out.
"The barn's last 'cause it's easy and we rest."
These words landed us in the stall behind
Fred, the calico stallion, and Henny, the prized Jersey.

What peace! The sun threw a little lamp
in the stall's corner revealing
the tail feathers of next week's work.
Henny and Fred, clocks of farm time,
rustled only enough to keep the barn alive.
Pop talked about nothing; I giggled at nothing.
My eyes fixed on the doors' huge hinges --
providers of grating, unnatural sounds.
A breeze eased Pop's hand onto my chest --
a warm conductor releasing impulses only skin holds.
With gentle moves, like molding clay, he taught me
my erection, penis envy, and frottage.

Every barn thing sang its part of melodious chords:

chickens scratched and pecked in the hay;
the beagle fell asleep nearby;
gray doves and pigeons peaked down;
Henny chewed and Fred stomped a barn beat.

Peace took Pop; I dozed on his shoulder,
my short curls capturing his long fingers.
Oh! to remain so collected by him.

But then the sun lamp went out --
the huge hinges screamed "Fire!"
and Pop became lead over me.
"Slowly" -- he said too late.
His uncle's boot was on his back.
Our conspiring overalls fought our nakedness and
invited the smile of bigoted male mockery:
"Now y'all didn't do that thing right. I'm
a good teacher" -- he preached, unzipped, and sang:
"No. No. No." -- until he had taken us each
in turn and left us crying and spitting hay.

The barn darkened:

Henny broke from her pillory;
Fred kicked his stall door;
Hens left their nests unattended;
the beagle bayed; birds flew distractedly.

Pop cleaned away the unnatural with his shorts.
We dressed slowly -- he zipping and buckling me.
Before the huge hinges, he tied his bandanna
on my head and mine on his. We donned hats
but called on these headrags whenever

When a Drag Queen Speaks

For Miss Dana

Her sequined mini-skirt
had not a nodding acquaintance
with her floral top or
crisscrossed run-up stockings.
Her wig had no preference for
front or back, straight or curly.
Her whole appearance was "*cullud*" chaos.
But her loud "I have an announcement" --
one short line at a time --
spoke to souls not ears.

"They throwing *The Children* away."

Ice applauded in every glass.

"I ain't got no more black dresses."

Her sisters signified, slapping the bar.

"All our husbands -- gone before us."

And doing Bette, Joan, Diana --
she'd pull out our pain
through our cocktail laughter, and
deliver it raw, naked, bloody
on a stage of mirrors and one-man shows:

"Leave that tainted *bugina* alone!"

The week before she died, she quipped:

"Miss Ada's taking y'all Aunt Hagar."

Only a pickled pig-feet jar
with a slit cut in its lid
marks her fund
their crime
our memory.

Laughing Lesbians at the Coffee Mill

May in Oakland: 1992

Carol Aust surrounds them
in a well-lit corner of::

"How It All Began"
"Family Matters"
"Departure"

Around a round table
their chatter ignores
a staring, painted irony.
They pine for
Betty and Clara's new love;
moan over
Penny and "hitched" Hannah;
tear-up over
Jill's split with Ellen.

The drawn men avert
their gazes into backgrounds
as painted women gawk.

Gapped legs create
new feminine spaces;
their deep loudness
exclaims a women celebration.

Yet, eyes of sisterhood
draw them in to destroy
the disposition of eyes.

"Here, man woos woman."
"Here, six kids -- one on her back."
"There, she's leaving, coming to us."
Flinging bold laughter
at coffee sippers
they stride past shame and exit.

An Old Black Aesthetic

I can't see trees the way you do --
Not because of paltry vision;
I have long since quit climbing trees --
Not because the bark feels coarser;
Trees send no spice my way as yours --
Not because their scents do not lure;
Their rustling, no music for me --
Not because their song is foreign;
It's all because no tree's live fruit
Has ever, to me, been quite sweet.
Trees, you see, aren't trees to me:
I know fruit that's hung bitterly.

Onanism

With fresh semen spent all over us
I moved closer to feel the gentle roaring --
always a sign of his after-pleasure.
My hand found its spot:
the rough nest of hair
in the valley of chest-boulders.
This is always my favorite part:
after all the thrusting and gushing,
peace breaks through and rushes him
into all the images behind his eyelids
while I fade into then and now.

Then, I remember the difference
of her breasts and how I could make
no magic with their beauty -- no passion,
only guilt for all of the absent hims.
Then, I see her displeasure
at the lies I never had to tell.

Now his hand on mine on him
brings peace again to all three of us.
I smile, and a bayou picnic starts its pull --

naked boys fling themselves from a rope swing,
tall pines chatter about the passion they hide,
a cool breeze banters with summer's heat,
we find a remove from sights not sounds --

I join him in a soft roar and a dream.

Toy Whip

When I was
a 'lil slave girl
we made our toys.

I found
a green pine limb
with a wiggly
sappy tail.

It was
my favorite.
Even the baddest
'lil boys
kicked dust
at my whip.

I grew
and Mama
shoed my feet
and ragged my head.
But I just looked
for bigger boys,
for bigger toys.

A Tree Died In France

For James Baldwin
December 1987

Every collard-green-picking Mama
Every micro-chip programming brother
Every Italian-suited black-eyed susan
And every super-masculine menial,
From sea to gloomy sea,
Stopped and turned a kinky head toward France.
Like steel guys used to fell redwoods
The hands of that kinky head tugged you up
And replanted you by yet another replant.
Then like a mammy standing over her baby
That kinky head bowed and watered you.
In vain it watered you: for the seed is dead.
Teary *agwu* after angry *agwu* filed by to kick
Away the snow covering the garden.
French snowy mountains had heard you enough
While hearths at home chilled without your fire.
Now, your leaves, branches, trunk will fuel us;
Your fire will make new seeds burst to sing
For Lycid's laurel to place on a kinky head.
As your leaves fertilize lazy shoots at your roots
Kinky heads will stand erect hardening their barks.
New strong spines will form; the fork will note
A strong resemblance to you in each voice
Made resonant by a sacred wind in your now forest.
And every collard-green-picking Mama
Every micro-chip programming brother
Every Italian-suited black-eyed susan
And every super-masculine menial,
From sea to radiant sea,
Will stop to rest one kinky head in your shade.

Puerto Rican Boogies

Avienda Ashford is peppered with
boogies spiraled around Condado lampposts --
slick dick-vendors sporting
stamped and patented smiles.

And in their souls
a rootless heterosexuality
swings pendulum-like for
dearies dolling dollars.

Satan parades on an iron-gray steed
branding apostles for his mission,
each marked with lamplight above his head --
an outward symbol of an inward grace.

And in their souls
no vestige of golden brown chatoyant --
a divination of African male-loving
now replaced with kente clones.

Vacant lampposts are gestalts:
booming business and thin trade.
somewhere, hearts, quick-paced,
pay for over-priced passion.

And in their souls
manhood shifts on agate and chalcedony --
sand dried too long to hold
hackneyed virtue -- now turned vice.

The Trade Turns

When he said, *Loving me is your worst fear* --
I knew he had to go -- forever.
Not that street trade matters at all:

the dirty fingernails;
layers of dingy clothes;
ashy skin and rankness;
smoky and liquored breath.

How could he matter? Just trade.

The first date we stole, cost me.
He was cheaper then, and younger.
Night was a cosmetologist making
him glamorous, sensuous, mysterious.
Passion made him intelligent, sensitive,
a man of potential and vision.
Day, the disrupter, made him the
unsightly unmade bed -- stained
with the unnamed and unconfessed.

This last date we stole, cost me.
Too much pillow talk about
others like me and their needs.
Too much looking into my eyes
to see if I am there at all.
He set up a sales counter
between us and sold me
my own love at a discount.
Seven years: I never knew the price.

Robert Earl Penn, Jr.

Patrick Cycle

For That Part of All People which Struggles or has Struggled to Thrive in Daylight.

Robert Earl Penn's humanistic appreciation of and approach to life produces complex writing that reads on many levels. Robert's poetry and prose has been published in *Essence* magazine as well as *Art & Understanding*, *The Portable Lower East Side* and other journals. His work is featured in the anthologies: ***The Road Before Us: 100 Gay Black Poets (Galiens Press)***, and ***Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS (Other Countries)***.

One

At sixteen
sex was something
that other boys had
already tried
Sex was something
that took the giggles
out of talking to girls
gave a new meaning to
dating and necking
sex was something
that put fear into my heart

Waiting, waiting, waiting
I had anticipated a change
four years of more hoping
that a button would be pushed
like the lever I thought made
babies when my view of the world
was altogether mechanical
tarrying by the girl's room
I thought it would take the
special combination of
beauty, brains, and talent
to spark my sleepy attraction
for the opposite sex

Lingering, holding back
restraining my urge
camouflaging it in games
identifying the ones who
were too young or dense
to know our activity
was different
losing
the one or two met along the way

the moments of experimentation
flashes of anxiety when
yellow stains resisted soap and water
I had just about given up

Focused my energies on studies
achieved a chance to travel
options opened wide
while my libido died
in the midst of straight laced bliss.
I got out of the town that reared
pushed me to success
at such a price
they never understood

Patrick was three years my senior
already in the post-*bac*
body builder
(which thirty years ago did not
involve steroids or
additions of great mass)
intelligent, doctor of the future,
monstre de la plage
because everyone turned their heads
when he strode onto the beach
in bikini trunks

All the girls swooned
he knew he could have his pick
so did I
would hang around him
because we were just two boys
he was the chaperone tutor
I would practice my language skills
inspired by the sight of him

I would awake earlier than he
and go to his room
attached to our dormitory
fifteen boys in language camp
to watch him sleep
his thick near black locks
plummeting over his resting brow
his compact arms springing from
well defined torso, classic symmetry
narrow waist, rounded behind
scantily concealed in *risqué* briefs
He awakened and I smiled, "*Bonjour.*"

We spoke in codes for which
neither had a lexicon
smiles and gestures
hands stretched out that
never connected with shoulder
waist, ass, chest
just enough so I saw him
try to touch me

It would have to wait
until another time
when he was not on duty
not responsible for fourteen
other gangly youth some,
perhaps, with the same desire
for cross-cultural insemination
and I would accept the hellos
enjoy awakening him each day
peeping into his glass cage
through windows designed instead
for him to watch us
imagining what it would be like
to share a bed with
a man as handsome, intelligent
and, I assumed, caring as he.

Two

I remember telling
Mme. Deforet how much I preferred
staying at her house
how much all things being equal
I enjoyed the *surveillant's* attention

"Ah-h-h" she was shocked
the institute had hired him
they would never have engaged her
had she remarried after her husband
died valiantly during the Nazi occupation

Patrick's mother and father
had divorced, in plain view of
all the provincials
left him at his struggling mother's home
to grow up on his own
"It was a dishonor"
without direction of the father

Nor did her three sons have
a paternal shoulder as comfort
but their's was different
his absence was due to natural causes
not presumed avoidance of responsibility
or the careless attitude of an educated
parent leaving the son to delinquency
that desertion guaranteed

Madame's warning only made
Patrick shine even more brightly
he bucked her estimation
smiled his way into my heart
kind and playful
studious and responsive to my attention
as far as he felt
his position allowed
promised to see me again sometime
on one side of the Atlantic
when we were both on our own time
when we could both follow our hearts.

Three

Patrick arrived on the heels of:
two years correspondence
months planning the perfect tour
days assessing my worthiness
hours of shame and hopelessness
minutes of hope for a knight
seconds looking for the bus,
with a classmate

They looked perfect together
my heart sank
they were probably a couple
though two French men would never say,
Make the most of it I thought
enjoy their company
practice French with them

We saw the sights
They remained with me,
in the guest room my family offered them,
longer than with his other former wards
A badge of honor
a consolation, I thought,
since he did not come alone
ready to escort me to his home

At the beach
Patrick and his friend pissed
in the water together
side by side
and I knew they had a
special connection
Peeing next to each other without
taking the other's penis in hand
without moving to hold one another
convinced me that they had already
shared this sweetness
come this close, closer
known the wonder of soft
and less soft skin
hard flesh of a brother in hand

Oh,
maybe there was still a chance
but it seemed it was only
my turn to chaperon
Patrick with his friend
watch their excitement
in my home, their far off land
celebrate their honeymoon
grateful that my room
not only had solid walls
but was on another floor
from the double bed guest one
so they could not observe
my restless sleep
alone, frustrated and
without affection
during the too long nights
they lay at our home.

Four

As fate would have it
Montreal and Boston lie in the same
direction from Chicago
so we traveled together
Mother smiling, Father driving
and I in the back seat chatting
in French between the two
medical students on their one
and only trip as far as they knew
to the United States, North America

Overnight in Cleveland
adjoining double rooms,
king size bed for mom and dad
two full size for we three
undressed after dinner
tired from the long day of conversation
sight seeing and sun
Patrick asked me with all his heart if
I wanted to share a bed with one of them.

Again, I thought of the sanctity
of couples which I imagined them to be
yet felt in my groin an enormous
desire to hold Patrick
be held by
swaddled by Patrick
felt by him, to
feel him
devour him
I said, "No. I'll sleep here alone,
You two are used to sleeping together."
"Exactly," Patrick agreed,
"that's why one of us can sleep
with you." And he smiled

After two years corresponding to
months admiring
weeks of awakening for
days lusting him
how could Patrick ask me to
choose between him and his friend
why would he need to know again
how could he expect me to break the pair?
"No, its all right."

I knew also if I slept with him
it would not be enough, one night before
I began college adventure,
they ended New World vacation
It would not work for me
not merely dreaming about how
it would feel
but also remembering
how it was, good or bad
would have been more than I could bear
"Really," I said, my heart spinning,
"it's okay. I'll sleep here
Alone."

Six

We missed a biennial
and then another
six years since he slept in another bed
the night meant for us
I received a letter from Casablanca
Patrick was a *medecin*
giving alternate service to his country
working in a former colony
saving people who would otherwise die
in the desert beside camels without hope

Come visit, he wrote
My wife and children will be happy
I could see sleeping with him on the sly
(it would not be the first time now
so many years later
Ages after my hunger stopped asking
"Is this for real
is this guy single
is this just for tonight
will I be hurt?")
but not without the pretense
of both having women
of both living the status quo.

My longing could image myself
as the one who could break them, take him
My mind knew no man ever takes a man
from his woman, his security, his seal
of approval of good normal living

And though I longed to lie
beside him making love to one another
I could not travel long for a glimpse
and possibility of more
the probability of pain
and disappointment
despair on leaving him again.

Seven

Even now, thirty years since we met,
I think of him
I have wondered many times
what it would have been
if he had not asked me to choose
if I had chosen him
if he had said, "This is our time!"
if I had understood him to mean: This is the time!
if I were to find him again
fiftyish, divorced, lonely
if he were to write my old address
and the letter found me
if I would still want him

Thinking about him today
two decades since we
last shared postal intercourse
I wonder what his value to me would be
if we had merged then
I imagine that the French-looking
men I see from time to time
would not look as charming
and seductive as they often do
But I don't know

Looking back, I am now sure
when other boys were sizing girls, lusting
I was doing just that for the boys.
If there had been some discussion
and acceptance of the fact
that for some girls and boys
attraction to their same gender
or to both genders was natural
neither a stage
nor a mistake
was the right thing
for a young homosexual
I would have selected, "You!"

To this memory, ephemora
aura, vapor, ghost, I say
"Yes, yes, yes!
Let's spend this one night together!"
wrapped, intertwined, throbbing,
pulsating, humping, spraying seed
all over sheets that
neither your mother nor my father
would ever have to wash.

Jim Murrell

MEDINAS OF AIR

For my mother Gladys who, opening a Golden Book on a window seat in Harlem, drew me down into the life of the bower birds and the ocean of language.

Born in Toronto and raised in Harlem and the Bronx, **Jim Murrell** is currently a candidate for a doctorate in comparative literature at Columbia University. He met his half-sister and half-brother for the first time last year and they have been constantly amazed and entertained by the mysteries of revelation in the blood -- i.e. that a similarly textured and baroque vision of the world might be arrived at quite naturally by a lawyer, a filmmaker, and a poet. And that, in fact, the complete incomprehensibility of long division may have its source in the genes. He is dedicated to the triumph of African people in this society.

Subway Tearoom: Freeze-Frame

Tremor.
Far from the cylinder's heart, cello charges walls.
Tensile mahogany and shiver.
In this marriage of wetness to heat,
A contralto alive in buried rain.
Dynamo chants: the ceiling, the floor.

Entombed dogs, distant trains,
Snake-dancing their drench in the sunken room.
Bleed. Subterranean water.
Black-skinned lagoons, poaching on thunder drive
Bright hauntings of piss.
Air notes spin ammoniated legends,
Nocturnes of soil,
Spoor histories rich in loiter and
Themes from the drawers of the unwashed mad.

Crumble now,
From the steel door's sweat.
In trance to noise, to filth, to fright.
Harvested. Overrun in ecstasy.
Shattered in the Venus of this mouth,
Moan a cloud of thrown seed. And
Moan binds time,
Moan signs your life.
Seventeen-year old heat wrinkles the rush hour.

And later:
Kneeling, fallen into a geyser,
The tub's full force weaving scourge of fire, water.
Scrub of liquid flame, unfelt.

Face of the world is eaten away,
Struggle with the face beneath,
Poised in ice-memory,
Proof against steam and scald.
Tremble on the glacier's clarity:

Man-hands, powerful,
Broken from living onyx,
Roped veins, a warm catacombs,
Lift you at the ass.
In a veldt of burning hair,
Your hands consumed.

Once gagged cries of ignored headlines seem now dawns
Gathered for conga down
The corridors of the known.
And the force of finally understood news rises
Laughing from your toes,
To hurl you down the crevasse of light.

Junior High/Chorus/Martin Roche

Child voices,
Climbing air,
Explosions in a glass factory.
For miles soprano weather, sun-shone quills
Levitating.
High in the slope where the altos sail,
Child voices gathered,
Surgical as steel,
Brilliant as paper cuts.

Time ahead,
Two years, perhaps a drift of three,
Silted cantatas.
Smoking rivers shot dark. Unraveled.
Streaks of whiskey, sand, of arabesque.
Gravity piercing the wheel of flight,
Herons plummet to earth.
But not now.

And before: some haughtiness, some temperament,
Mrs. Gross has slapped my face,
Sunk her talons in my arms.
Choral giggles,
Interior alarms.
Solar wind lost, howls beneath my skin.
Murder kilns the blaze that leaps about my ears.

Now,
Down onto the stage: so much amber and pretend,
A wash of Orff and ice
Splashes out upon the dark
And Martin Roche afloat.

Then sing for Martin Roche,
Notes to torrent his manliness in flood.
Sing the metronome of his temple vein at soccer.
Songs: the hair, russet, at the back of his hands-
Brown wheat blown flat across his knuckles.

And puzzle,
A way to make him puzzle
Crossed words with me tomorrow.
Sitting together.
Homeroom.
Martin's lashes lit with southern windows.
Mrs. Gross . . .
Music . . .
Forgotten.

Toronto

As . . . savage, lonely iron
Driven from dust and stars and void
Through time, at earth fall,
Burns tattoos of day upon the
Random skin of night
So . . . unbidden, invincible is raised ambush of
Woodsmoke, snowsting or weeping, lotteries at the heart of
Innocent day.
Flaming stones spilling the sky of memory,
Flares melting coins weighting the eyes of the dead,
Stoving in the door at the tomb of yesterday
And within . . .
Steel-toothed winter, drowning Canada,
Mouth filled with blizzard,
Choking on razors of lake wind. Above Toronto,
Through marrow of the high, raw rooms,
Murdered sun hemorrhaging quotidian rains of
Slate, pearl, of blue-grey light.
Seeping frozen prairies, exhaled stillness,
Arctic smoke bleeding colors from dream.
Exhausted, my mother weeps:
Out of the cave of her bed,
Triumphs of sobs, ragged
Contralto beguines filling basins of dark afternoon.

She weeps her frostbitten toes,
Weeps her fall into the slush of Yonge St.
Drone of cold . . . the cold, awl in the bones.
Sapphire sprays filling her boots,
The glass truth of her days.
Laughter, a thrown lye,
Knife in baptismal welcome of the two white women,
Christening of whispers:
Monkey, nigger, *wesdindiun.*
In exile,
She weeps her home: intaglio of moon gates and
Star fruit studding fastnesses of hammered ultramarine,

Later, in near, in gathered seasons from the
Accomplished wine of the woman --
Fragile blue paper, rusting transformations of ink,
The forgotten drawer --
Her own voice speaks a rush of bouquet:
". . . Although the swimmer carve a phosphorescent
wound far out upon the night sea's body and in her
viridian wake turn to dance, to float beneath the
forge of white fires, yet the perfumed thatch
of the island will reach her. Even so, journey
warm-fleshed, incantations of scent.
Cedar, hibiscus, feral thyme
sung along the shining scar. Tendrils plying
the water dark to bear her home."

She weeps the mahogany envelope of my father's body,
Rumors of its resins, ghosts of heat upon her nipples.
Amber, his voice --
A year away on the merchant marine's ocean.

In these rooms is wept an anaconda of tears,
Gorged yet never sated, coiling our cells of muted day,
Always between us. I am four. This is my home.
Have I not run naked from the door
Beneath the white whip of it.
Peed on its immaculate wickedness and made it ordinary.
I do not weep:

At windows of arched dawn,
At the lintel to the world, I wait the
Coming of magic.
The pulse/dazzle of bell hoop,
The clap, the shimmering quoits,
Their dying and spreading brightness,
Ring tossed to lasso chaos,
Knelling the Catholic children to stand
Wind beaten and erect beneath the
Black power and order of the nuns.

Snapshot: Pelham Bay

Gladys Evelyn Waldron Murrell
October 28, 1907 - March 16, 1993

See her then,
Caught in disappeared light,
In the fresh green, the iodine breeze
Of a vanished summer's wading.

Recall her
In her strength,
In her beauty,
In her unadorned kindness,
In her open, unstinting embrace of life --
And the living,
Of God, and prayer, and the unseen.

Recollect her
In her wonder,
In her brilliant conjuring of fun,
In her humor,
In her big alto laughter like copper
Raining down air.

Remember her
As I do:
In late, slanting bronze August,

Her hair, a savannah in flame.
Coronation.
At an inlet to the sea,
The whole world comprehended
In her capacity to love.

In Them

In them.
Closure.
The Chinese puzzle done.
Thaw and dissolution of bodies borderlands,
Twoness into one.
Line of congruence solved in pleasure's sea
And the kindling of the singing --
More intense than aria,
More varietal than scat,
More intense and softer yet.

And in her.
In the wet and warm, the drinking reaches of her:
Woman's music.
In the sea phosphor-hot melody of in her,
Spark gorged tide,
Green canticle of friction that dies and leaps
Alive again,
And grapples over glans,
And then corona,
And then the shaft.

The shaft.
A hymn.
She teaches me a hymn, in woman's time,
Of oceans along the shaft.
And it sings a lambent peace
Into my brain, into my ass.
Complex to a simple.
Unsuspected. Elemental.
Universe to a lentil,
Ganges to a rill.

And she knows that I am afraid. At first.
Knows me fugitive in the war of loving men,
Arrived plundered from barrens arid of habits
And survivals.

But she is a woman walled in kindness.
And she kisses me so sweetly,
Upon the chest, upon the neck,
And pulls me from my ruins to her healing ocean's
Drowning,
Well of her vision giving,
Spring of anointing spells.

Yes, to name this new singing: sea
Is right, I think.
Not like fish and iodine,
Not kelpy and low-tide sand flat,
Gulled and sun-sunk orange,
This trilling fall through world's yielding hollow,
But crystal cave,
Submarine in limestone cliff.
Spelunker's virgin,
Night pure, bluely blind,
At each torch, new.

There is, of course, then . . . earth.

And in him.
In sorcerer's struggle, contender's arena of him
Bread, wine of armpits sailing sinuous
In my head.
And too much hard competition and politics
Between us.
And rote. And sorry.
But alive. Alive again.
Not dying, not dead.
Sorrow gone to lust,
Riding tight, tectonic magic past ego's sentry of pain,
I wax a bursting storm,
He storms a beating rain.
Heavings of a world testifying:
How difficult to be a man.

Luxurious, pounding battle joined on
Volcano's slope.
We, fire beings, equal to its hope.

And might there be shit?

And not caring.
Flown free of potties,
Their empty talisman over me.
And will he bleed as I have bled under him?

Lost, threadless in hairy core heat
And tunnel's mazing capture
To fuse us
One,
Too.

He sends me private words through
A gathering crest of light.
I weep a dark trough's answer in triumph and
Defeat.

Gas

Flowered the moment,
Flowing out beyond my clothes,
Bits and pieces unhinged to atoms. Soft shrapnel. Gas.
Gas to night and trees and shards of burning mercury light.
Gas in the earth and reaches of the park.
Vaporized before the hot success of touch.
All of me gas at the interstices of the man who holds me.

In the wind of his blood.
In woven roads of wind above the trees. Thrown high.
Up in the medinas of air told in kite strings.
Diffuse, dispersed, disappeared among nations
Of atmosphere. Lost, the finite map of me.
Its frontiers gas, its secrets pulverized.
Overturning the etched stone orbit, my yoked blindness,
Scorning death's wages, the rote sums of compulsion,
Meaningless to their generosities,
Mote in the radiant piercings of their counting house.

Mixing me, insistent: the park's green body smell --
Honeysuckle-rampant, the broken hearts of sapling ailanthus,
Privet and leaf mold
And farther, streets dissolving their wetness.
Our bodies too, liquored in the commonwealths of our maleness.

There will be the heat death,
The collapse of matter, the dulling of stars,
And requiems and sorrows and final ponderings of God.

But not in the universe and fullness of this instant,
Not while I bloom seeking the edge.
Blown cumulus of desire, pulse of hard-on flaring
As sun plasma flares to lash the light years.

Insinuating, overtaking, containing night and time.
Bridging history and prophecy, hydrogen ever on the cusp
Of burning, risen from the splendor of the transformed now.
Galaxy, Gas, All.

Mosquitoes

In soft humus heat,
Wood voluminous on conifer incense.
Noon, August,
Winding the green scald.
Voiceless. Arboreal loom, trees in empire.
Dapple climbing, the dank, the bright.

. . . Not voiceless: stridulation.
And archipelagos of bird trill swarming silver in the canopy.
Also leaf wind like water plunging,
Unseen.

Bill and I: hurtled naked, soft and hard,
Stones of flesh flying at the mouth of a deep.
The deep, a pool of chestnut oak.
Need belling, rippling shadow, wood and world.
Skins, a flaring climate,
Beaten rings mingling the rotunda of barks.

Their silent female armies come.
Then whining songs and victory.
Flying syringes.
First hordes dumb,
Stunned on serendipity and glut.
Our hearts pumping courses of the blood feast.

Well then, take this sacrament of rutting men
And dream.
Dream its vertiginous Mass
Dream its distillate lust.
Spiral in updraft fever dreams,
High and yet again
Higher in the helix of desire:

Below the earth turning through
Some other summer,
Wide day transfixed in the shining mesh of pollen storm.
Your daughters carrying off whole towns.

Bob McNeil

Secular Sacraments

Dedicated to: Edward Parrish, a late friend whose memory is celebrated in the Heaven of my mind, and Pat White, my mahogany Muse.

Bob McNeil's entire philosophy on life is based on Thomas Paine's statement: "My country is the world, my religion is to do good." To this fact, Mr. McNeil adds: "Published writer for nine years, professional artist and Thespian for four of those years."

The poems in this collection were published in: *Big Red News, Blacfax, The Black American, Black Masks, Green Hell Gazette, Holy Titclamps, Kola, The New American, Psychopoetica, Real News, Spirit, Wicked Mystic*, and *World of Poetry.*

A Novel Novel

At 15, I knew cracked institution walls
Couldn't contain Heaven's stolen fire inside me;
My novelty-polished feet ran animal-free
Through western lands,
And made trails for the roads of united fates.

At 16, an eternity later,
I found religion in hedonist's eyes,
Found answers to my universe
Between olive-oil-soft legs,
Found alternative life style suits that shaped me.

At 17, being more sophisticated than my limited world,
Than inhabitants who settle into conformity's oblivion,
My rebellion became a river
Flowing into an endless sea.

At 18, I survived concrete-hard knocks' school,
Majored in the philosophy of experience --
Life's poetry,
And searched for this man in emergence -- me.

At 19, having been a passage bird,
I settled into one woman's nest.
Warm beams passed our lives,
Which expressed infant-new emotions.
Love's glow died
When I took heed of temptation;
Consecutive fifths invaded our home.
Adult realizations --
The unwanted strangers came.

My Mahogany Muse

My Mahogany Muse,
You are fleeting sensations --
Youth personified,
But a soul permeated
With sagacious spirits.

Outside of Eden shared
On Utopia's other side,
A jaundiced-eyed,
Crack'd, blue marble world
Treats you like yesterday's news
And reduces your essence to lining
For a platinum prison,
But you, sun-hot with fire,
Burn your way free.
When oppressive hands try to hold/control,
You become water
And slip away.
Wherever there's injustice,
You become air
We desperately need,
Rising to occasions.

My Mahogany Muse,
You are applicable psalms on Sundays
I believe in.
You're my eternal sun;
I bathe in your golden glories' light.

As you find me
Naked to peers,
You shelter my tainted soul
From raging storms.
The insensitive boy
In this sophomoric man
Lashes out at healing touches,
But oh! sweet salvation,
You forgive me.
My brethren are erection-proud
Seeing my descent into voids
You fill.
I no longer build castles on clouds
Or mount toothpicks to reach the moon.
Love is the bridge
You help me cross.

A Leaf In The Wind

Hear secret languages,
Divine orchestrations,
That taught birds to sing.
Hear the world's origins beat --
Take heed.
Wire services cannot communicate
Eurythmic feelings of ancestry.
You can't reach out/touch
Electric, chaotic lives.
Hear profound propaganda,
Which instilled self-sacrificing
Obsessions in salmon.

I am a leaf in the wind
Who will land on ancestral land.
Time travels thru ...
It compels me to shed diluted skin
And embrace the sun's divinity.
No chemically induced dementia
Can burn memories' roots
Or make me paint sight organs
With rose colors.
Freedom rides -- blowing wind
Refusing to follow currents of stupidity.

This voyager is not alone
In his primordial quest.
Alienation's campaign is hollow
As election day promises;
A means to obliterate first
And ask rhetorical questions later.
I am a world citizen,
A part of the majority,
Throughout the Diaspora.

Far away, from adopted existence,
The aboriginal and free
Give what they take from blessed lands;
No one can tip pyramid balance within them.
I will become a part of hands
That pray to pure blue skies
And lovingly caress living earth sustaining us.

Confessions At Midnight

On my bed,
Under night's cover,
I watched your image --
An apparition,
Chase me.
Strange things you said
Stayed emblazoned in memory.

At midnight,
In moments of weakness,
I confess
Opposites attract;
So I sing
Songs of desperation.

Let's walk hand in hand
Thru love-war's wreckage;
Pick up pieces of our assorted lives,
Once shared.
Erect monuments
To celebrate our coexistence,
Build pyramids
That represent our balance
In an imperfect world.

Maya

Maya,
Transmitter of timeless truths,
The embodiment of our primordial ties,
And a link to our future,
You humble my quill to the inkwell.

Maya,
Soul of fire,
Heart of love,
You lifted my mind to infinity,
And now I genuflect to you.

Maya,
Mother of a history-made moment,
Author of our hope-fostered dreams,
I salute you.

Empire Smut

Electric blue night,
Danger-red lights
Flashing,
Walking phallus'
Fecundating fluids
Get peep thrills.
Men spring
Like horny toads
To get whore-moans.

Libidos cry out
For juicy fruits:
Headless,
Confused,
A-choice chickens;
Concrete-rough
Raw trade;

Women,
Like the four brides of Sammael,
Sizzling,
Silly-clone
Pseudo-sisters
Making the block.

Liquefied lust:
Larva of life
Pours down sewers
To return to polluted genetic pools.
Oh! flaccid shrine of Priapus;
Impotent Eros,
Obsession is a gun --
Welcome the bullet.

The Fire That Yearns

Laughing with the wind,
Ruling my destiny with a smile,
Mining rainbows for a bit o' paradise,
Not a single thought crosses this one mind
On my stratosphere labor.
Pockets empty as a salesman's solicitous sentiments;
A head full of dreams 8,107 days old.
These hours spent are liquid;
They spill onto another page of self-made history.
These gnarled fingers occasionally dig up a chunk of hope,
Which is sustenance for this sometimes misplaced heart,
And I am intoxicated by my lot.
I spread the spoils, cast my bread,
And the potholes of life will be filled.
Doubt, who is fleeting fast into the empty tenements below,
Laughs like a frothing jackal.
But, slowly, steadily, my conscious mind is becoming as rich
As my nocturnal, horizontal travels.
I mentally become Adam
And imagine every rotation of this planet's axis is Eve --
A real first.

Behold A Great Red Dragon

Out of apocalyptic visions
It came,
Out of adolescent nightmares
It came,
From the nether world
It came to the fore.

Thousands flocked
To Jerusalem's ancient wall
And communed with Israel's god.

Bullets pierced the sky;
Earth burned below.
The sun rose,
Like a casual god,
Amidst madness.

Masses climbed almost endless stairs
And gazed upon a shapeless mound
Of ancient rock.

Phantom voices
Sailed thru wind;
Distant primal screams
Woke the complacent
And self-righteous.
Alas, it was too late.
Where people once stood
Shadows remained,
Saints and infidels died as one;
Mutated bodies fell on highways
Going nowhere.

In the end,
There was a hideous space
Where faith used to be.

King among men

His words
Flowed
Like wine
Intoxicating
A generation;
Inspiring
Uninhibited
Freedom cries.

Share this chalice
Of peace,
May it
Serve you well.

Visions,
Timeless as
African skies,
Mountain top dreams
He'd never climb.

Share this chalice
Of peace,
May it
Serve you well.

His good book life...
Torn
Asunder,
Crucified,
Misunderstood
Messenger of love;
King among men.

Share this chalice
Of peace,
May it
Serve you well.

To Jamaica's Bobbie Burns

I hear your legacy sing in seashells, Claude McKay,
And they tell me your muse-inspired soul soars
Like an eagle with your ancestors.
I begin to feel the history-winding depth
Of your roots in my being,
Listening to lays about your people.
The ballads say your warrior-strong forefathers
Were brought from Madagascar
In Manifest Destiny's chains,
And had kept the last thread of family ties together
By declaring a death strike on an auction block.
Each would destroy life's flame in himself,
They vowed this doom-sealed oath sadly,
If they were sold to separate owners of plantation prisons.
And as a child, your tribe seemed to call you by name.
... With passion's rage-red blood
Of these unsung rebel-heroes permeating your veins,
And their stories of strife to nourish the earth-green seed,
You grew to be a tree-strong Black man -- Claude McKay.
Now I hear your lyre's genius fill the West Indian skies,
Inspiring my glory-bathed spirit.
Oh! sage-bard, I, too, am proud of our race,
And with no inclination to apologize for my night-hued skin.
All that is me thanks all that was you for this revelation.

Brad Johnson

Dare To Hear

For Charles Darden and Michael Khoury, who loved me.

Brad Johnson was born in 1952 in San Rafael, CA., grew up in Philadelphia (where he now resides) and studied at Yale (B.A., 1974), the Universite de Paris (Sorbonne), and the Institut Des Sciences Politiques (junior year abroad), before abandoning a brief stint of graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley to write and live a simpler, blue-collar existence.

His work has since appeared in the *Yale Banner* (1974); the "*Nassau Gator Gazette,*" a newspaper printed aboard the USS Nassau (LHA-4), upon which he served in the US NAVY as an operations specialist and interpretor/translator (1981-1985); *Essence*; *The Pyramid Periodical*; *Black/Out*; ***OTHER COUNTRIES: Black Gay Voices*** (Other Countries); ***In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*** (Alyson Publications); and ***The Road Before Us: 100 Gay Black Poets*** (Galiens Press).

Liberty Blues

hazy dawn in the bar
with rum smudge on crackerjack,

pants down at 3 am
by the john, engaged in
desperate writhings with someone
civilian (mistaken orifices, passions
splayed against a wall),

lovesick and fantasizing
for the sailor "on the blue horizon,"

anonymous good-bye in a daze
before the gut-wrenching run
to the pier, wet and dark,
in time to assume the watch,

heart torn and legs whipping
through the moist of fog,
early morning dock ripple and
ship's whistle, reveille on your return,

gray to the eyes as drowsiness
tugs at eyelids that won't
be going home again
(where the aimless wander alone)

to have never been a child,
hog-wild and sailor-blue
and ludicrous,
knowing nothing of this world
and caring less

East Of Love

I

on a lone bus in the long night,
highway lamps as constellated stars
guiding the weary prodigal home

as I leave him who shared with me
such fresh and visceral love
(with the bitter taste of its
dissolution on my tongue,
in the amber of memory preserved)

II

the torment of remembrance at each
bus stop calls back the glint of such
former bliss that I raise a clenched
fist up to bleeding eyes,
pull it down to clutch a blinded heart

then onward again, this journey to
perhaps some newer desert of promise,
a brief friendship at the oasis
wafted by the winds of lies
(whispered wounds from lifeless
sands beyond the ridge),
the lonely camel-ride

III

the bus rolls on through darkened
billows of hills with its load of hardened
wayfarers returning home,
empty stares and glaucous minds caked
with the stuff of illusions dissipated
on still other desert streets

moving through the moonless night
I feel again his touch, now denied,
that once spawned such smooth-in-cumming
rivers, all life, all now become
a distant regret in another's arms

as I drift homeward, weary, leaving,
and running into what night

Song

I

loneliness is a cruel hunter,
steadfast and unrelenting as love

(waves of cool perception
for the other as illusion,
as dogged dream)

II

morning became his eyes
as madness glistened beneath pearls
of deeds remembered
of the fast night
of sweat and ire

III

he was a handsome man in black

The Labyrinth

Bull fucks with no smiles in the labyrinth,
just teeth, wild and gnashing lust

(ride the thigh with unswerving need
for the fullness)

Bull grunts with bellowing eyes

(on down through black belly hair,
smell of night sweat, wet leaves)

love, mastodon-like, between
massive and groping hands at the
ends of thickly forested arms

(Bull is riding roughly,
Bull is lunging roughly),

cordoned with muscle to lift
me up and set me down
astride the blast of thighs

(with ridden thigh and unswerving need
for the release),

impaled on the cock at the crotch
of sex and viscous semen

(on down to long bullcock with glans
swelling, succulent plum, smooth
balls)

in his navel, my tongue
on Bull's milk

Question

what of the purposeful underpinnings
of man's need to rend and break

what is eating at his heart

no cool waters'
and the mist of mountains' silence,
but, as a shroud,
the noise of self and hatred
is wrapped about his head

what cancer but a peculiar avarice
of the soul eroded
with an insidious taint of the past,
guilt but a symptom
to characterize his loss

what schism is it dictates
that human pain be self-imposed
and sorrow a siren's arms
on a rock of the beckoning deep,

ensuring loneliness
in the fabrication of islands,

man drunk
on the ritual of moaning,

all bridges asunder

Green Love

manflowers are giving it
all they've got

such gorgeous hybrids

look at those muscular
aurelias in the fucking
grove

sunleaves are straining hard
against steel air

the buds are sweating

roots are bulging
beneath warm earth

nitrogen fixations!

through the night
you can hear
the rushes moan

Corrupts Absolutely

cannibalistic deceit eats
twice a day
from a bowl of the hearts of rancor,
sits back in his seat
of charred bones
and directs,
from the vantage point
of blood-filled lagoon,
a campaign of total genocide

from infants' severed heads
he gleans portents of the future
which he believes will safeguard
his treachery from the eyes
of His Maker on high

Blue Canaries

blue canaries aboard a naval vessel,
aboard a naval vessel of blue canaries off the starboard bow,
off the starboard bow of blue canaries below decks,
below decks with blue canaries getting greased by horny hull techs
seized with such a sudden urge to fuck birds

Venus was once fucked on the high seas
by a bird off the starboard bow of a naval vessel;
with the swells of orgasm the bird became a horny hull tech
wiping grease from his fingers with her hair,
from which emerged a flock of blue canaries
taking refuge below decks

blue canaries figure prominently in the life of a sailor:
once on the high seas he has the sudden urge to fuck Venus
(with her hair entwined about his fingers,
he swallows blue canaries taking refuge below decks)

among the azure swells of horny hull techs
below decks fucking blue canaries
with grease guns,
with blue canaries greased below decks
on a lonely naval vessel,
Venus off the starboard bow

The Mountain Nymph

for my beautiful twin, Carolyn

I

among our rejected passions you will find
the mountain nymph,

the mountain nymph of the unfinished
immaculate conception, the mountain nymph
of the regressive woods and the rejoicing
eye, the mountain nymph of monotheistic
stones, the mountain nymph of the
feudal hermaphrodite

II

the angel hunts her, pursues her,
envious of her epileptic lovers

the woman with two faces opens
the door to her corrupting sigh

the man who leaps clings
to the window for fear
her drunken tempests will tear him
from his frantic conspiracies

the ear in embryo escapes
this barbarous world while blindly
taking wing towards her voracious
spectators

III

on blue, virgin snow, incensed
glances of fugitive gods slice
her hip to witness there, beneath
pigeon-throat-colored stars, the
splendor of her tragedic blood

IV

the mountain nymph sleeps beneath
the earth, beneath the mountain,
beneath the rivers of rolling
cypress trees

a diaphanous veil of moss
covers her face tawny
as the great sedge-warbler

russet paws stroke the opiate
herbs she eats

her javelin eyes seduce
the chimera of dazzling ebony

at dawn,
she shrouds herself, bronzed,
under golden, yellowed leaves

Wake Up, The Dream Is Real

you know, martin luther king, jr.
was never my hero,

for the emasculating exigencies
of survival in captivity
taught me, with no smiles:

blood for blood,
a soul for a soul

until he was shot,

and then I knew that
therein lay the seed and
the fuel and the engine
for bitterness and hatred,

our present nightmare

criminal
that a wildly free man
of peace should challenge
our comfort in violence
and demand that we do
that most liberating
of things:

LOVE

that we go the distance,

that we fall through
the ends of our dream
without waking up,

that we obliterate fear,
become real men and women

death was too good for him

Redvers JeanMarie

Hejira

Redvers JeanMarie was an actor and writer who died of AIDS-related complications on February 15, 1989. He appeared on the stage in **King Lear** with the New York Shakespeare Festival and in Peter Nichol's *National Health* in Paris. He was the nonfiction editor of ***OTHER COUNTRIES : Black Gay Voices*** (Other Countries). He also served on the national board of Black & White Men Together.

The English Language

The English language speaks
Earnest truths
Cool limpid and clear
Like the freshet of a spring
That rushes to greet the ocean
It sees the mountain
Unadorned
Knows the fixed stalwart
Steadfast part of love
The garnetiferous ferocity of rage
From the Caribbean
It undulates a current of air
That coils waist hips and thighs
Softly spoken by an Indian
A mantra
Of devotion and humility
A simple early light of dawn
Studied concisely by the British
It betrays sinews of intention
Pithy with mild constraint of cadence
In the West African
It towers a sonorous nobility
Thought revealed
The Black American welds
Earth to laughter
And the dream to song
So graced by the harmonies of many
Are the sounds
Of its own applause

Raga

for Bradley Phillips

There's splendor to the quotidian
It overtakes languor
When the mind is free
Of foreboding
In this space
A shaft of sun cuts a pane of glass
Settles on a table
A seashell
A bottle of spirits
A bowl of chips
and a promise
Of eternal becoming
Afternoon suffused with longing
Like lovers on the screen
Wrapped in glory
The moment looms large
Still
As do shadows on the carpet
We are bodiless and simple
A tawny light
On the altar of creation

Swimmers In The Air

This chared and corrugated heel burning in the sand
Led me to a silver wheel
A boat on the ocean
A horse poised at the mountaintop
Wagging its tail
A man black and naked swam circles in blue air
The wheel turned
Filled with figments of fear and joy
I glided with him
The low wide sky began to gray
And evening's curtain fell
As we drained a winged heart ahead
Of blood
With terror
Majesty
And pain
At our command

Hejira

for Yves Lubin

There were no colors
A night without azure
And a cloud-covered moon misted
Our skins
Such yearning could not be pinned
A rustle of trees gave no answers
Nor the ambient air
A sense of plenitude
The road beforé us with no symbols
A restrictive sense of nothingness
Wrapped us firm
I've a natural strength
And can follow with you
I heard myself
Whisper
Questions long forgotten
What we've become
Has no name

Echo

A house stands anchored to the hill
Framed by memory
While the wind whirls the river forward
This place has not altered
These past two years
Pine cones
Air redolent with fall
The morning sun still bathes the roof
Slats of wood welcome with their silvery shine
I wait under the pine tree
I used to watch from the bedroom window
Surrounded by a relaxed horizon
Would I be welcome
I mutter to the door
Silent walls echo
I've come back to a life
Once ours
At the center of the mantlepiece
The box that smells of sandalwood
I gave you on a Christmas day
Still inside
The card reads
Always remember you are my light
Spirited from sleep
Your footsteps
Remind me of my stealth
Shaken
I hurry down the hill
Haunted by the ghost of a glory
I will not know

Sonata

for Anne JeanMarie in memoriam

A keyboard showers
And awakens silence
Wrapped in thrilled movement
The glide of fingertips spins you
Like a swimmer in air
To this receded world
Where sharps assume the moment
Then flow to flats
Fallen pellets irrigate mute keys
The mother's portrait hangs
Her face is an oval
She sees only harmony
Behind her stands the shepherd with his staff
Shaded by ailanthus
At the meadow's midst
He cares the flock
Does she hear this music
Or see the son on a frozen path
The furry smell of beasts sits on the carpet
Lives she can no longer tend
But she beams an amber light to swallow darkness
Poised on this serene trajectory
Yet you fear the end of each begining
And the beginning of every end

G. Winston James

Hope And Regret

This selection of poetry is dedicated to my romantic dreams that happily have held on long after my innocence was gone, to the memory of Peter Andy Bakara -- a love lost -- and to my search to find new love and happiness in my life. It is a commentary on how closely hope and regret resemble one another and how much I wish this were not so.

G. Winston James is Performance Coordinator for Other Countries: Black Gay Expression. He also served for a time as co-editor of *Kuumba*, the African-American Lesbian and Gay poetry journal. His prose is featured in Vintage Press' recent anthology entitled ***Waves: An Anthology of New Gay Fiction.*** His poetry appears in two Lambda Literary Award-winning anthologies: ***Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS*** (Other Countries), and ***The Road Before Us: 100 Gay Black Poets*** (Galiens Press). He has read widely in the New York area at venues including Nkiru Books, B. Dalton, and A Different Light bookstores, the Fez Club, Nuyorican Poets' Cafe, Columbia University and the New York Public Library. G. Winston James promises to write forever, and will.

Come Into My House

What happens when the ball is 'ovah'
And the Children have gone home from the House
Is there crying in the streets
Is there wailing in the tearooms
Is there any regret on the IRT

What happens when the party is ovah
And there's a Child alone in the House
Will the mirror render him pitiful
Will the hormones make him angry
Will the uselessness make him scream

What happens when childhood is ovah
And the Children must leave the House
How many leave in a fit of anger
How many leave in the midst of a read
How many leave in a box

What happens when time burns the House
And the Children must admit it's ovah
Do they run back to Times Square
Do they stroll like has-been legends
Do they hang on young necks like keys

What really happens to the Children
From the Houses that condemnation built --
Pre-fab

The Lost Boy

I used to have sex
With my sister's boyfriends
Not because I was magical
But because they were men.
Men who did not care about darkness
Or mystery, or gender,
Or love.
And I, for my part,
Was the same, but young,
And did not know then
That magic could be wasted,
Dirtied like my knees,
Perverted like my voice,
Fucked like my mouth.
And I did not know then
That all that was my magic --
The innocent smile
That called the sunshine,
The almond eyes
That spilled the stars,
The urgent heart
That set rivers free --
That all of it
Was me,
And that once lost
I might spend
The rest of my days
Searching for my own magic
In the same places
Where I'd given it away
Accidentally.

Caterpillar Stories

Some years from now
You and I will lower ourselves
To sit on moist earth
While orange flames
Watch themselves in our eyes
As they waltz on dried wood
To the music of crackling leaves
And chirping crickets.
You will stroke my cheek
With the back of your right hand
As softly as the night breeze
Steals aroma from the pines.
And I will instinctively
Lean my head in the direction
Of that hand,
Knowing that in its wake
Will linger your fragrance
Suspended like pink petals
On a slow-moving stream.
Then I will close the distance
Between our moist mouths
And your breath will suffice
To sustain me as we
Wind into light-headedness,
Collapsing into sleep
Just as our heads
Come to rest on the ground.
During the night,
I will vaguely remember
Having been someone else.
Someone alone.
Someone searching.
But I will awaken
With your arm across my chest
And your right leg
Between my thighs,
And I will have forgotten dreaming,
Forgotten even the necessity
To perform such an act.

Cruising

An hour to kill
And a lifetime to wend.
Bedding down with polite
Little demons is
Pleasant
But I would
Die
For a more permanent
End.

Consolation

Have you ever seen butterflies
To dance at night?
Neither have I.
But then there are
Some kinds of beauty
That the gods
Save solely
For the dying.

The Precious Moments

I never thought
That dying would be hard
Until you left me
With diamond dust and blood
Slipping through
My clenched fingers
And crystal shards
Embedded in my paralyzed feet
In an empty room
Where I had stood alone
In darkness
Clutching an hourglass
That you had set
Into motion.

Fagbasher

Did you think it was over
Simply because you didn't
Leave me the breath to continue
To scream "Why?"

And maybe think that just because a bat
Could crack my skull and
Shatter my world that it could
Murder my spirit?

Oh, no, my friend.
Rest firmly assured,
Divas don't die
Quite that easily.

But I guess you were figuring that out
While the first man grabbed you up,
And had it plain even before the fourth man
Held yours arms tight against the bars.

Swinging their fleshy bats behind you so fast
That you thought you could hear them
Cutting through the air at your back,
Threatening to beat you down.

You didn't know that getting fucked
Had a sound, did you? Like a fight
That you were losing all the more,
The harder you resisted.

Go ahead, scream, motherfucker!
And pretend that your hard little dick
Isn't saying all the things you were thinking
When you were swinging a bat at me.

Scream, and I'll clog your throat
On my way out from your twisted depths.
Yell, pant, choke on all the dead faggots
Climbing over your teeth to watch and chant:

"Fuck him, fuck him."
As you get slammed by a guy
Who wanted to be faggot
But just ended up being a man.

"Fuck my friend Dean out of him!" one yells.
Open your mouth wider!
"And I wanna see my friend John."
How do you like a bat up your butt?

Three men down, one to go.
And a thousand bloodied homos gathered
In your cell, yelling
"Fuck the life out of him."

Until the last man
Cums in your ass.

Uprising

I want to start a campaign
One that gets homosexuals
To recall
What it means to be gay
A campaign that will scrape away
At millennias' worth of stone
To unearth the legions
Of sissified warriors
Who lived, died,
And worked their magic
In, on, and about
This world.

I want to ignite a protest
To gather all the mystics
In one place,
That we might speak that one truth
Which will suck the moisture
From the air
And create oceans at our feet
That truth that will
Snuff out the light
And remind the Children
That we have been here
Since creation.

I want also to invoke the Bible
To say that in the beginning
Was the word
And that word shaped the Universe
Into a thing of so many wonders
That mortal man
Can only fail to see
Unless he admits that
He is as blind as the stars
And far less significant
Than the trees that have survived
Far longer than he.

I want to summon
The truth of names
And the defining energy
That dwells within them
To let the mouths of our enemies
Show us that
They have always known
That we were defined by power
As the fairy's magic lives
The flame of the faggot burns
The strength of the dyke holds
And the gaiety of the queer endures.

I want to ignite a blaze,
A conflagration of lesbians who remember
What it was like to watch
Their sisters burn in the night
Struggling against the fetters
That bound them
To the witching posts
And to the lies
And to the angry penises
Jealous of feminine power
So softly displayed like iron
At the hot core of the earth.

I want us to shatter the windows of heaven
With diamonds
To assemble before the throne of God
Dressed in the stars
And holding the planets in our hands,
Asking the angels simply:
Are we not beautiful
That the rivers and the wind
Sing our names in the gloaming?
If we are not, then destroy the world
For you have put nothing marvelous
In it.

Finding My Way Back To You

Hush
Hush, my brothers
There is nothing quite like
The sweetness of silence
When it is broken by pain
We sit cross-legged
At the passing over
Our circle complete
Razors at the ready
To give each other
Peace.

Hush
Hush, my brothers
Let us explore one another
This last time
Skin and bones
Brittle to the touch
But beautiful the way that
Dead trees are lovely
When their leaves have dried
Yet refuse to surrender to the
Breeze.

Oh,
Oh, my brothers
We slice one another with blades
Made sharper, less painful by our friendship
Bleeding rivulets of longing
That collect between us
Like reminiscences on better times
When these same wrists
Were meant for kissing
By dark men and their dreams of
Love.

Hush,
Hush, my brothers
There is no more need
To fear each other's blood
My fingers slip between
Yours and Peter's
Yet we hold on
Through the bloodletting
Red, red water caressess our bodies.
And returns us to the
Seas.

Hush,
Hush, my brothers
Listen to the music of darkness
Closing in around us
Hear the beating of wings
And recognize them
Craig, Dwayne, Michael, and Rory
Singing songs of victory and poetry
Like thunder and rainbows
Tied in red ribbons in the
Trees.

Oh
Oh, my brothers
Close your eyes and forget
This is not suicide after all
Only the healthy and sad
May commit such desperate acts
We are pinks and purples fading
Who have decided to sing Chante Moore songs
While holding hands in a whirlpool
Of gay Black blood and
Love.

Umar Hasan

You Can't Stop The Rain

Born on December 24, 1961, Umar was a poet and humanitarian who died on October 26, 1994.

The Day Hurricane Elisa Hit Home (June 9, 1989)

I remember a time when there were no surging
temperatures or sweat-soaked sheets.
I remember a time when I could run 5 to 7 miles
a day: sunshine or raindrops I ran.
I had these little red shorts,
if you ain't got the looks use what works,
and they worked.
I'd run during rush hour,
so all my neighbors would see me.
Sometimes they even yelled out words of encouragement,
"Yooohooo, child, I want to drink your sweat."
I would hit them with rainstopping comeback,
"Hey, if you can keep up, I'll let you bottle it."
Many tried, none could keep up.
I was fast; faster than fast, I was as fast as
a shooting star. And my shorts? Louder than thunder.

But, now my sweat isn't as sweet and
walking two blocks brings about thunderous coughs.

Why me?

I remember a time when the word "normal" meant
sunshine, cool breezes, and rainbows
when normal meant Tuesdays followed Mondays,
Wednesdays followed Tuesdays, and doctor appointments
were every 6 months, not twice a week.

But, there are no more normal days; only bottles of drugs,
thermometers, and faint memories of dreams long forgotten.

The clouds overhead signal inclement weather
and flash a neon sign that pierces the clouds
and says clearly
a storm is coming.

I remember the day the storm hit; the day the doctors
gave me the news
June 9, 1989.
Got up that morning hearing the joyous sounds of the
neighborhood kids.
No tears in their eyes.
The sun was their slave
and it shined as bright and as long as they wanted it to.
No dreary forecast for them.
One child fell and cut his knee, and after
a short free-fall of rain, he began to play again.
He knew, HE KNEW,
the cut would, like the oceans of hope, dry up and
cloud images of what was.
This child, with all the giddy of a normal nine year old,
continued to dance in the sunrays of his existence.

Why me?

He doesn't notice the dark cloud on the
horizon of the self-forgotten, self-hated, sexually frustrated,
ostracized dreamers
but, why should he?
The cloud doesn't signal the end of life for him.
He and his friends are a world apart from
the pending disaster.
And I am a world apart from them.

So I turn on the television to somehow break
the focus this dark air mass seems to have on me.
Then, the Weatherperson diagnoses my forecast
with all the passion of a bucket of muddy water.

"Hurricane Elisa is heading this way
but earlier indications are that it will
only hit the front shoreline of
the city. Thus, normal citizens have
nothing to worry about. According to the mayor
there is nothing that can be done, just pray."

Just pray.
He didn't have to tell me.
I knew the hurricane was coming pounds ago,
and no raincoat could keep the wetness out or in.
There is no protection from the storm yet.

June 9, 1989
was the day I disinfected my dreams, boarded up
the red pump of emotions and silenced the
drizzling echoes of youthful laughter.

The world didn't stand still that day, it just
walked on by.
Sunglasses, suntan lotions, Beach Blanket Bingo and
vacationing thoughts of a prosperous life.
The world just flowed on by
as the tide beats harder and harder
on this shoreline taking out pounds of sand
with each wave;
each wave leaves less energy to fight the storm,
the disease; everyday since THAT day
I look out my window seven floors up.
I wanted to feel the wind under my wings
and fly off over the black clouds of this reality
to a place with no name, no clouds, and dreams
Dreams!!!
Long forgotten

"I am sorry, sir, the test results are positive."

June 9, 1989
6:15 pm

Hurricane Elisa hits home.
At first there is only a raging calmness
then the first drop,
and then the downpour.
Next, the wind cut off all the lines between me
and the outside world---me and my family,
and the rain ran over the dam
and the rage hits home.

"WHY ME?"

Fogged into this world of hopelessness
there are no more insurance policies of a
distant rainbow.
Their colors fade in the silence
of a bursting barometer
signaling yet another
high pressure front.
And images of yesterdays
jet
  stream
        by
          in
              loneliness.

June 9, 1989
there are no more days now
just moments
with pills, Lysol and
poetry.

"Why me?"
"Why me?"

You Can't Stop The Rain

You see it
approaching
like a wild Tornado sweeping
through indigent arms of Kansas.
Handcuffed dreams
surrender you to the undercurrent.

Helpless,
you stare out open
tinted windows.
Hypnotized by the colorless sky,
screams gush forward as rain slowly falls,
DROP by drop.

When Eagle's Feathers Fall

"I always thought I'd live until the day I died," said a guy with
AIDS on *L.A. Law*
and I think of my life
made of rivers of pride.
Nothing could stop this
soaring eagle
from nesting family
hopes high atop
mahogany trees.
Old ladies have heard the
churping cries of hunger
and fed me with their loving wisdom.
Neighbors cheered from armchairs,
dusty with hope.
Playmaters addressed me as "Professor"
cluing in all doubters of destined greatness.
Leading a flock of kinship,
mother circled college graduation like a
proud hen displaying her golden-Black egg.

But what do you do
when eagle's feathers fall?

I feel the infected feathers
open up sores hidden from
proud-blind eyes of family and friends.
With each hinting cough the air shrinks
and the nest of pride decomposes
and reveals food to be consumed by vultures.

I know I will never fly again,
so I sit in this pile of feathers
too weak to spread my wilted wings.

If He Really Loved Me Then Breathing Wouldn't Hurt So Much

I had seen him before, but
the light was different now.
Sunshine stood on his skin
and blew a sweet scent in the air.
His eyes glowed like a devil
possessed with passion
his walk made music and
his voice sung background.
I would not let this dream
end without an introduction.

I said "hello"
and he said "hi."
Then the grass was greener
the sky bluer, and my heart
took-off.
Peacock feathers spread
and I knew I had met love.
He was my faceless dream;
my nameless prayer.

When I looked into his eyes
I saw a healthy future filled
with romance and
life.

We took long walks on
short piers holding each other's
heart
and
breathing each other's
dreams.

Sometimes I'd stop and
try to remember if I ever
knew the colors of the rainbow.
I couldn't recall the world being
so bright and alive.
The sad hollowing thoughts
before him hide in the
shadow of each joyous tear.

Until,
one dark evening my bowel
vomited the truth.
As I stood there soiled and
speechless,
my heart began to
peel as I saw his motionless
eyes.
I turned and
walked home.
I called him two baths
later and told him

"I have AIDS."

There was no sound
but the deafening drop
of his tears.
He let go
of the phone
and the colors drowned
in the blackness.

The endless days
without him have no distinction
life is suffocating.

Cautious protected
encounters yield
guilt for unauthorized
risk taken

but, guilt is soon
replaced with rage and anger.
"He didn't really love me,
if he did then he would still be here."

"If he really loved me then breathing
wouldn't hurt so much."

Each night I
pray and dream
of his
return
and the end of this
sickening nightmare.

One Long Line

I grew up believing that when visited by Mr. Illness
a trip to Mr. Doctor in his house (hospital) was best
no attention to Insurance policies, credit-lines, or blood-lines

but today
I endure rush hourlike lines
of disinfected care for
lowly non-insured burdens.

Soul-less bodies
make grand entrances
to flashing lights and noise.
Suffering faces
plaster the Halls of Medicine crying for someone to care.
Old Ladies grasp for air
and their empty pocketbooks like victims preyed upon
by Medical-Sharks.
Children bleed a river of pain,
but ranked and filed they all must
wait and
wait and
wait.

In 4 hours 22 minutes:
a medical clerk has opened up new wounds with her eyes
as they point to the end of the line,
a registration clerk fingerprinted me, my friend, and 3 references,
a first year medical student questioned my illness like a Nazi
with hemorrhoids,
and the Beauty-school-drop-out CASHier asked for
$137.00 for care.
I had $7.00.
I passed it under sterile glass.

I'll walk
home.

Waiting For Flowers

It is springtime for everyone;
almost everyone.
I am still buried in the darkness
of winter.
The sweet aroma of flowers
never visits the darkness;
perhaps afraid of getting caught
in a world of viral men with contagious dreams.

Flowers are for those
who can watch them
grow
and not fade in the shadow
of their petals.

Even now,
as I grow downward
like potatoes,
I still long for the embracing
arms and the enchanting scent
of heart-red flowers.

Flowers that will grow
in my grasp and not die
with me.

I Want To Live 'Til...

I want to live 'til...
Leona Helmsley gets out of prison,
Jesse Jackson becomes President,
Michael Jackson actually walks on the moon,
and Madonna puts on some clothes.

I want to live 'til...
"The thousand points of lights" include African-Americans,
the War on Drugs is over,
the War on Racism begins,
and America get off its ass and starts caring.

Thomas Grimes

Glass Closets

For Ricky and Jeff whose courage taught me to renounce fear.

Thomas Grimes is an Actor, Playwright and Human Rights Activist. Originally from Syracuse, New York, he currently lives in Boston. As a member of the performing arts troupe *Brothers du jour*, he co-authored and toured nationally in *Through the Fire: A Choreo-drama About Black Gay Life.* His work has appeared in *Black/Out, Gay Community News* and the anthology ***Poets on the Horizon*** and ***Reclamations***.

Equations

Asking me if I'm
Black before being gay
Or gay who just happens to be black
Is the same as asking about
Chickens and eggs
Whatever came first is irrelevant
There are no common denominators

Theoretically speaking
I am not to be defined
By some simple equation

I am not to be
Added up
Subtracted
Multiplied
And divided up by Afro and
Homo-centricities

Nor am I to be fractionalized
Calculated and rounded off
By a square-ass root
I carry my own self over
To the first power of just being me.

Love Poem #7

I want to baptize you in my sweat
Anoint you with kisses
Touch you all over
With a laying on of my hands

I want to see your tears
Turn into white wine
And the love you cast upon me
Come back to you
Whole

Black Velvet Nights

On smooth black velvet nights
Our love becomes a rising tide
My crescent-moon smile illuminates
Your eyes glitter like stars

Drifting on the surface of the ocean
Your hands become sailboats
Gliding the waves of my rushing ecstasy

Your lips are seashells
You press them tight against my ears
I listen to the sound of your roaring pleasure

On smooth black velvet nights
When your body sifts through my hands
I know I'm a king building castles
On my own familiar shore.

On The Menu

I like my lovers the way I like my coffee
Black with lots of sugar

I like freshly-squeezed hugs in the morning
Kisses that taste of oranges

I like my toast buttered on both sides with lots
Of jelly and jam between sweet rolls

I like sausage over bacon and I prefer it
Hot, juicy, well-done and tender

I like my eggs hard (boiled that is)
Over easy was never my thing

I like breakfast in bed because it's the only way
To get down to the real true grit.

Snapshots

Photographs and old songs take me back
Back into my joys and my miseries
1989 was a hell of a year
I broke up with my lover
Lost my oldest brother to AIDS
Lost seven friends also to AIDS
Two others to street violence
Lost a childhood buddy to brain cancer
And almost lost my mind

I have arisen from darkrooms
Humbled on bent knees
As I flip through albums
And listen to old songs
I will continue to sing
I will continue to dance
And laugh at photographs
And the faces I miss
Their smiles deeply etched in time.

Miss Alma

Miss Alma came into this world as a man
But girlfriend knew she was a perfect lady
Her face was always done up
Tangerine lipstick neatly applied
Miss Thing glowed like a sunset

On weekends
Most of her time was spent hanging out
At the bar
The same bar where she knew all the people
And all the dirt

Anybody tried Miss Alma
She would read you from cover to cover
Letting the whole joint hear your story
The queen commanded respect
As she sat on her bar-stool throne

Sweet and petite
Miss Alma could work her magic
Without casting a spell
Just by batting her Maybelline eyes

Miss Alma said she could handle any man
She encountered
Said no matter how big his dick was
She could pussy-whip him and throw him out
He would still come back for more and more and more

The last man who came didn't want to leave
Wanted to make himself at home in a place
Where he didn't belong
He was one of those "takers"
He took her time
Her pussy
And her life

Miss Alma was a damn good seamstress
Good at getting her shit together
Made her own clothes
Made her own way in this life
Never asked nobody for nothing
Not even the permission to be herself
And some man plunged a knife in her body
Plunged it
As if sticking a pin in a cushion
Over and over and over again

Miss Alma came into this world as a man
But left it as a woman
And girlfriend knew she was a perfect lady
Her face was always done up
Tangerine lipstick neatly applied
Miss Thing glows in my memory like a sunset.

Addiction

Here lies a junkie for your love
Addicted to your sweet passion
Craving another fix

Drenched in the cold sweat of your heat
I shake
Itch
Scratch my head
Daydreams flake like dandruff
I want you
To help me kick this loneliness
I'm tired of OD'ing on the blues
Inject me with your love

February 10, 1993

Arthur Ashe was buried today
CNN broadcast the funeral live
And had the nerve to pause
For commercial breaks
And station identification
In the midst of a testimonial

Thousands attended Arthur's funeral
Family members along with dignitaries
Of these thousands I wondered
How many had ever touched him
How many did he know by name or face
How many were there in his hour of need

I weep not only for Arthur
But for all those who have and will continue
To succumb to AIDS
I weep for the invisible faces
Whose eulogies will never be nationally televised
Whose names will not appear on the front pages

Arthur Ashe was buried today
Whose funeral will CNN broadcast tomorrow?
I weept for another life
Gone away too soon
And I pray for a cure
Taking too long to come.

Yellow Brick Blues

Reality is gone
Abstracted by
An annual boob-tube obsession of Ozmosis
Abstracted by
Yellow brick blues
To follow-follow-follow a fantasy
To a land where munchkins
Pygmies in white face
Have a funky good time
Singing "Ding dong the wicked bitch is dead"
Dorothy brought the house down that day
She knows how to crash a party

In reality
I say the girl committed murder
In the first degree
Guilty
Including larceny
Smooth
Like the ruby-red slippers
She stole for her aching Toe-toes

In reality
I say the girl is a fugitive
Running scared
Running for her life
Running from flying monkeys
In search of talking banana trees
Running from Auntie Em
A child abuser
Running from Uncle Henry
A child molester
Running
Running anywhere
As long as it is no place like home

In reality
Glenda is a root-working witch
Who smokes opium
She cast a spell
Got Dorothy high as hell
Now she trips in poppy fields
Trips
On giant spit bubbles
Trips
Over rainbows

In reality
With or without a brain
The scarecrow will always be insane
The cowardly lion
Choked to death on a fur ball
After Dorothy sold her heart
To the tin man
Suffering from lockjaw of emotions

In reality
Abstracted by
This annual boob-tube obsession of OZmosis
Caught up in a cyclone of fantasies
We are desperately
Desperately
Seeking something real.

Glass Closet

If you don't affirm your own existence
Nobody else will
Nobody will stand your ground
Or fight your battles
Nobody will bleed for you
Nobody will protect you from being called
"Faggot sissy punk"
Nobody will rip the tongues from the mouths
Of those who spit at you
Or break the arms
Of those who use sticks and bats to beat you
Take control
Shed your fears
Do it for yourself

If you don't affirm your own existence
Nobody else will
You have to stand tall and proud
Like the king or queen you are
You have to walk defiantly down streets
Where you know you aren't wanted
And say "step aside"
Fight if you have to
Bleed if you must
But affirm your own existence
There is no hiding place
Living in a glass closet will not
Protect you

If it shatters be strong
Don't let the rocks that are thrown
Cause you to crumble.

Thomas Glave

Landscapes And Elegies

Thomas Glave, a graduate of Bowdoin College, has been a James Michener Scholar of the University of Miami's Caribbean Writers' Institute, an Altos de Chavon Fellow in Literature, and is a 1994-1995 Fellow of the National Endowment for the Arts/Travel Grants Fund for Artists. His work has appeared in *Gay Community News, Callaloo, The Evergreen Chronicles, The Massachusetts Review, The Kenyon Review*, and other publications. He has work forthcoming in ***Muleteeth***, and ***The Best Short Stories by Black Writers***(Little, Brown, 1995).

White Guilt

Such tenderness --
enough to make one cry.

It makes *them* cry, after all.

The power of tears.
Useless and ruthless.
We know

how well tears will feed a nation of starving children,
provide fodder for the canon,
nourish the insane,
the weary, the worn-out,
the sacred and profane

and the burnt-out.

Tears whet the fires of gentrification.

Addle. Make self-named saints out of
Satans. Muddle the real of the down-at-heel.
Are, in fact, evil.

It is a shame to feel so guilty.
Bygones will not be erased.

We are the faceless you do not recognize.
We are the evidence.
We are the witnesses

in colors of blood
and stone.

Our Lives

Our lives still fill our days
with collectible hours, moments,

frozen snapshots, clutterings
mapped in aspic, sheens and stills,

blank moments before the picture's taking,
before our flesh flashes in the camera's eye.

Still, we reel out our rolls of film,
reel out our lives of split-second

tragedies, lovings, primary events,
overexpose ourselves, develop our crises

to the hour's time when we transcend
our negatives, our inconsequence

in the continuance, so many flashes
before the end when we enter

that darkroom, when we become light.

Gay-Bashers: I

Men who seek to prove themselves can be cold;
aim hate for man-eyes meeting theirs in kind:
suspect others whose meanings may be told
in those glances, in what hate hopes to find
in the eyes and walks of those who make ill
the world of man-things where fem-hatred rules
in rape, in shadows, where women (whores still)
surrender to or must fight off the cruel
death-thrusts of rage, tears, hot fire-hiss. So
the story goes, old, blow by raining blow,
aimed now for queer-heads stalked through alleys, halls,
tearoom screams, blood spilled in love-furtive stalls,
choked-out cries in night's new terrorist fields
that bring morning mourn-cries. And coffins sealed.

Gay-Bashers: II

See them? Lean, loose-legged? They are the ones,
young men with nothing and No in their eyes,
young men, blood-lovers, so fond of the knives
that slice out our lives neatly. All in fun
-- for we must not be. Us. Must not exist
if they are to be Men, with confidence
bright blue world is theirs, still round. Difference
appalls, makes men hard, fearing we resist
that callow and stuttered dissonance. We
in fact resist poorly, clutch closets, abjure
slums, prize TV, praise God we are not poor,
homeless. Enjoy our witty company.
Still . . . knives await us as we navigate
old horrors. Their outer, and our inner, hate.

The Fear

Black men loving mirrored selves do wear shields,
don veils for worried eyes, in no way trust
kind invitations, naivete that wields
power to love that transforms chill to lust,
transforms tricks to lovers ensconced in arms.
What will he want from me? -- Is love enough?
Such questions bring random raw thoughts of harm,
fear, dissidence: *loving him will be rough,*
hard: the hatred he has for him will be
indissoluble: will reflect in me
(yes: I will be too dark, too small); my shield
must stay: cruelty or contempt, to stay steeled
against his sly invade. Poor coats of mail
reveal what's in our eyes. Rage. And we fail.

You In The Ward

Nurse-practitioners are not always good:
walk on soft heels through death with business-eyes;
seek to make weak heartbeats beat as they should
and, failing, think "virus" -- and no surprise.
The IV continues to feed your sleep,
pumps in the fluid sickly organs need
as fevers gather heat, slow steady steeps,
and rude infections (lesions) brightly bleed
though breaths that stammer "end" -- as end begins,
and you, good skeleton, novitiate
to death, proffer what remains: virus-skin
to nurses' needles you propitiate.
I would rather nurse my slow hate of them
but take your hand, pray. And curse God again.

Sickroom Elegy

to the memory of my father, Thomas Glave, Sr.

Between orchids of distant continents,
whose blooms mocked sickroom propriety
as if they, loving life too well
for us to understand, insisted callously
on proclaiming hothouse *joie de vivre* here,
knowing well of life's precious balancings
between seasons when humans and flowers fail --

there a grayness persisted, insistent growth
heedless across soft senile terrain,
sheer pluck in the sickroom's lion's den.
Anachronistic sprouts, to challenge this
dim season's close in the stuffy room
harsh wheezes punctuated, even they
possessing some last vestige of energy. I thought

how could gray like this be used, how
could such frailty be worth anything
to anyone who had never seen
those curls swirled over your head in sleep
that promised waking, the beneficent sleep
that mimics this darker sleep, your unmaking,
and quells infants' cries in nap-prison cribs.

I prayed for some softness to return,
for the weary curls to reassert themselves
and splay out across the senile head
the disorderliness that was always yours,
the same way the phalaenopsis cluttered its
long lady stems with a heavy queen's ungainliness,
ruling out neither beauty nor encapsulated

beauty-to-be, potential inflorescence. You
spoke, when speech came easily, interrupting my

silent moments of selfish prayer ("All prayer
is selfish finally," you said one time
when I was a child and prayers were
only visions, scrolled strangers galloping
across Bible fields of parchment leaf

in the church of the primary school I attended.
"Prayer is selfish finally," you said,
"because we're only asking for what we want,
and really only when we want to ask for it."
I disagreed, allowing selfishness
to clasp my hands now, to bend my knees
in this sickroom hour, thanking God

no sanctimonious street saints came to march
as on the Epiphany, murmuring theology
which only during life can be understood --
the dying have no time for it). The words
you spoke sent me to the cellar room
where all your beloved books still slept
as mildew covered them in basement dreams

and signatures scrawled in spider hands
trailed cobweb glints on old flyleaves
that preceded tales of the Africa
you unearthed as an iconoclast.
Among the books I found the gift
given in someone else's time, to someone else,
the raging words you learned in Aenon Town

as coffee grew over the measured words you spoke,
the words I spoke to you in our time
in the sickroom where only orchids grew.
Do not go gentle, I mouthed, dreaming him,
dreaming that in essence I could become
the incarnation of someone else's son
whose holy words burned over that mildewed page,

whose sorry pleas you now understood
as I understood there would be no wizardry
to transform myself into his
former self, to keep you from that dying light.
You and I, we were Thomases from birth
and your grandfather a Thomas neither of us knew
born in the farmer's parish on that island you knew

and loved, which love I chose not to know.
We were all Thomases of the first name, not the last
(your grief embodied in me, that I'll be the last
Thomas to Thomasize the family tree,
so carefully constructed, now only a nothingness).
We could not be great; *not our destiny*,
or, as we said, laid out in the cards

where kings and queens take precedence
over bent-kneed jokers and one-eyed knaves.
Greatness unintended we could stand,
devoting ourselves to worthy causes and poetry,
as when, after you're more completley blind,
I, seeking reasons for continuing,
will read to you poems of great women and men

and pretend, sly deceiver, that they're mine.
Do not go gentle, I contrived
to ally that misery to our own
and told you, blanketed in pseudo-down,
"Death is universal. Misery's not our own,
it loves company, it thrives on more than one
supplicant to feel itself truly adored"

-- and all the other sickroom cliches I could find
or recall from conversations beneath the ground
in that dirty subway you fought years before,
where diabetics hobbled with bloated skin
on canes fashioned of fashionably thin
Malacca, all the while disdained by nurses' aides
who spoke of so-and-so's illness, how "it was hard

on the poor family, but for the grace of God,
in whose hands it rested. But God be damned,
goddamn His brassocattleyas' machinations
that deceive insects in their mating frenzies,
bidding them enter those flowered mouths in yearning,
only to leave with orchid sperm adhering.
In this shadowed hour, as window blinds

cleave sunlight into elided sentences
which dreamers pick and affix in their notebooks of knowing,
thinking, *surely the sun will tell us where to go*
and how to do, and if not, there's still the chance that we
may follow it along that blazing path
and, yes, with God's help join the stars
as the ancient spectral heroes did-- in this hour,

Father, I pray. Your senile, sickly head flares gray
as your face blooms decay, ruined skin
fit now only for the compost heap's rotting pile,
the backyard compost where we were told
as children, wondering, *toss your skins.* I think
where is it you're going to--
how can you leave? You will never see

or comprehend the ravings of the son
whose ravings won't change what's to come,
no matter the lungs pouring forth hysterically.
Worthless, the sun-sentenced hours' passing here
whose light foreshadows all of everything
as epidendrums blossom like evening whores,
as gray blackens into sheer Godless gloom

before that night -- dear God, *not* gentle -- covers you.

Love Letter: Lilacs

These lilacs, from our garden, were for you:
though brown now, in the slow death-creeps of spring,
yet brown-soft with your what-was. Look: I bring
them to your grave, replacing dead with new
as death, your newest love, encircles you
in earthly seduction, earth-wraps the face
and tongue now decaying in decadence
I too had courted, did to virus lose.
Should I speak of lilac-lavender, then? --
The sprays that little comfort this defeat?
(I will still keep our bed, your pillow, neat;
will not banish your life-smell from the den.)
These lilacs were to be ours. Wedding rites
were to be ours. Not graves. Not viral nights.

Prayer

(Older Black Gay Man Reflects, Speaks to the Young)

It will not be all horror for you, this.
Surely that time will come when you, still green,
will know fearless touch. Will know what it means
to stroke him, kiss him, without condom-hiss.
Will know not to fear the bright hot spilled blood
that in love's passion gentler teeth may draw.
Surely you will outlive the fear that gnaws
as bodies mount before the sweeping flood
and casketeers grow rich on virus-waste.
Surely, his life, unfettered, will be yours
and you will know man-love in loving hours
and smells shared, sweet of him, and youthful tastes.
Surely virus won't claim such lovely eyes,
bring you to your knees. Old. And God despised.

Thom Bean

Aboboi On The Half Shell

Dedicated to James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Assotto Saint, David Frechette, Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, and all other divas everywhere.

Thom Bean is a poet/writer/performer/activist who lived in NYC, Chicago, and now San Francisco for the last fifteen years. Bean has served on several national boards: GLAAD/USA, NABWMT, OUT/LOOK, The National Poetry Association. Bean published *Quarterly Interchange* and *Castro Express.* Bean has contributed to ***Black Men/White Men, Resisting Racism, The Road Before Us*** (Galiens Press), and the forthcoming ***Words Of Fire*** (Vega Press). Other publications include: *SF Chronicle, The Advocate, QW, Out/Look, Outlines*, and the *SF Bay Times.*

the original outing

the air was electric
the sun was high in the sky
and i was in my corporate drag
wall street colleagues by my side
suddenly i spied him in fierce puerto rican red
parting a sea of grey flannel
fuschia bangles and wanton nelliness
a floral cache all clashed loudly together
proclaiming his arrival
swish swish swish
oh my god he's coming this way
will he notice me
will anyone notice him noticing me
i turned and looked into a shop window
in quiet desperation
trying to blend into the surroundings
but there was no escape
like a guided missile he zeroed in
his sissy radar ever vigilant
yoo hoo miss thing flutter flutter
how are you doing sister girrrrrrl friend
lisp lisp lisp
i could have slit his throat
there was an eerie silence
the fear of a greater spectacle
prevented me from reading him
for being her real self and giving me
some serious reality check
in the middle of my work day
my heart drifted up to my throat
i felt my mouth open but nothing would come out
the queen did not falter
snap snap snap
after everyone had noticed her performance
she smiled sweetly and floated on
oblivious in her own world
leaving me to get a grip on mine

just another day

crack addits and alcoholics will not dream
of sugar plum fairies today
the homeless and the abused
won't roast chestnuts and sing carols by the open fire

the fantasy of the american dream and glasnost
has not reached the unemployed and hungry today
the soup lines are just as long and sorrowful as yesterday

abuse and abandonment
apartheid and the klan
conflict and corruption
greed and global warming
make for
a lonely hard life

manipulation of the masses
toxic air
toxic land
toxic water
is reality for so many today

and everyday oppression and ignorance embrace us
both rich and poor
guaranteeing a higher price to be paid tomorrow

middle class values have not reached
those who cannot afford them today
those without the basis for survival
the disenfranchised
share no complicity in our middle class dreams

and so many who were middle class are no more
yes crime and disillusionment have reached the suburbs
and claimed the unwilling working class
among its legions of recession-weary prey

wake up america
nobody has told you this is a depression
the politicians are afraid
of how you will feel
of what you will say
of what you might do
when you find out how shitty today really is

for so many christmas is just another day
no special plans
new years is just another day
no one to share their lives

birthdays are just another day
no one to whom they feel close enough
to leave their legacy
no one to care if they live or die

valentine's day is just another day
strangers populate their lives
there is no meaningful caress

thanksgiving is just another day
no one special with whom to dine
and for many blacks
the fourth of july is a cruel joke

a real leader
would be cause to celebrate
but there is none today
and while we wait for change
we become more isolated
more polarized
and grow further apart

the absence of caring enhances
what we feel in matters
both great and small

who will care if i am sick
who will care about the missing children
who will care about dying people with aids
who will hold me when i am weary
who will care about hate crime victims

who will care enough
to make a difference in my life today
yes today is just another day
another hustle
for the outcast to survive
the incompleteness
of bleak reality which
lives on

anch' io son pittore

i have painted many themes
i have painted lofty dreams
i have gilded my reverie with nobility
honor seems to mean i have had to discover
my own colorful history and bearing

my motto has been that truth will prevail
as i journey down my trail
toward becoming more righteous
my palate of desire is as valid as those who rail
about the sanctity of their family values
the sanctimonious few would skew nature's hue
they want to subdue any alternative view
and the natural flow of the love they eschew

but i have brushed my canvas wide
with sincerity and desire too long set aside
on my canvas you will find reflections
of men i have come to know better
my vulnerability remains intact
though weathered by disrespect

if you only knew how much i want to imbue
world consciousness with my view
of the majesty of the rainbow
my heart has always been open wide
but no one ever came inside
my house has always been full of love
but no one stayed from ebb to tide
there were transients who took my stuff
there were men who gave but not enough
there were needy little boys
but none gave of themselves freely
to my dismay
for some i had to pay
was i wrong to remain the hunter
and not be the object of someone else's charade

as i portray my personal tale
this canvass serves me well
my subject is mostly male
and many men come to mind
some were good men some were were bad
some were fast loose men that i had
there were nasty men of little consequence
and some had great fame

in my twenties i was attracted to powerful men
because power was what I had least of
in my thirties sensitivity prevailed
i longed for a man who could understand my culture
a man who would not fail
in my forties i aspire to mentor
to find a soulmate to share the realities of
a heterosexist world not meant for men like me

though i would gladly have had just one man instead
of the many that I've had and who have had me
i have learned much and want less of what can never be
of what fate and fortune has deemed i will not see
yet i still muster a certain vulnerability
there may yet be other men
i have not run out of paint or pen

i have learned to rub my bristles thoroughly
along their wily course
to stay away from lovers who see what we do as perverse
to avoid lovers who are not ready to settle down
to not be someone's exotic colored hang around
unless his lust is a convenience I have found
devotion is more important than
what anybody else has or thinks
values mean more to me than
color or culture or passionate embrace
i cannot resolve somebody else's problems
if he is not motivated to resolve them for himself

trust is very rare in gay life
and men are seldom who they seem
i will not be so trusting
of the judgment of single friends
not so emotionally invest
in men who cannot express their dreams

anch' io' son pittore
my painting is a work in progress
i used a little yellow
mostly whites browns and reds
watch out for competition and power
i have learned to value my uniqueness
and my own critical view
i have decided to share my joy and my frustration
to display my unfinished painting for you

i fill my broad brush boldly with amour
i wash my excitement with this forbearance true
paint well though you may be forsaken
paint true with humility and forgiveness
paint fate generously with humor
make your values recognizable in each hue
give it your best flavor
your rhythmn your culture your dignity
that essence which makes it uniquely you
greet your enemies wisely .
stand by those worthy of praise
note what lessons others have learned before you
or don't paint men with honor and style at all

multicultural manipulation

a truckload of mexicans told me
they liked my new red car
a gaggle of filipinos were giggling
while sitting at the bar
the chinese were discussing gambling
while eating from an earthen jar

the east indians wore gold saris
while dancing to a sitar
the irish cops were hiding
while watching on their radar
the german bosses were laughing
while the blacks were spreading hot tar

the homeboys and cholos were fronting and dealing
and about to go to war
the jews would buy the garments cheap
if they thought they were up to par
the italians picked up garbage cans
and sang operas from afar

the puerto rican and cuban bus boys
thought the drag queens had gone too far
and to the muslim taxi drivers
yuppie buppie preppie or whore
class can mean so much more
than race in expressing who you are

meanwhile the wasps and wannabees were teeing off
one yuppie just yelled fore
the leather crowd was not too loud
as they discussed black chaps and gore
greek stevedores and mariners cut a deal and made a steal
before they came ashore

a whore working the waterfront did not notice
the robber's knife before it tore
that's why the handicapped and the seniors are least safe
on the stained streets anymore
haitians continue feeding sharks while
non black emigres we accept more and more

education health care and justice
are lavished on those with wealth galore
and the poor the homeless the creative
are the ones that we ignore
even though mediocrity and moral zealots
are something of a bore

our bureaucracy likes war and macho pinheads
better than the america that we adore
the genocide of native americans
doesn't bother us anymore
our new growth industries are
prisons drugs boosting chopping and germicidal war

our taxes and cost of living
and unemployment seem to soar
if we need more money we could cut defense
legalize and tax marijuana and the whore
screams from the poor and dying go unheard while
a whisper from the rich is still a roar

we trust as our visionaries white men
who know nothing of our spiritual core
the earth is dying due to man's folly
mining for minerals oil and ore
the air the water the gangs the violence mean

you see multiculturalism is survival
it's not expanding your horizons while closing my door
there will be no parity in the board rooms
the idle rich swore
but the crisis will overwhelm us if we don't
get past the stereotypes and the lore

if the haves have their selfish way
we will fight each other instead of those who closed the door
who stole our culture and land and much, much more
the pattern's clear for all to see
those who have been here the longest
have no more rights than before

the melting pot won't melt the score of cultures
torn from many lands and sprinkled shore to shore
like spices culture keeps the flavor
that was once there before
our conflict comes from disrespecting difference
and hating who we aren't evermore

the man who went away

you knew when you left me
that i loved you
that i supported you
right or wrong
I was there for you then
through the good and bad
when you needed me

and when i lost my confidence
my faith
my friends
it was you that i turned to
your arms
your warmth
but you were gone

how can a love grow so cold
between two lovers
that you never call
you said we would always be friends
did my tears drive you away
did you blame me for something i did not do
or was it your anger that made you go

you took all of your stuff with you
but you left a residue in my heart
do you ever think of me
when you turn
and i am not there
did you really love me at all
do you miss my gentle touch

what is more inportant than the expression of real love
is your cup overflowing with new love
while mine is haunted by memories of you
i have no more tears
no more answers
i only have the emptiness with which you left me
and myself

don't ask me to explain

don't ask me to explain
why i have to rant
why i have to fight for my survival
why i have to forfeit my dreams
why i have to remain an outcast
why i have to pay more to get less
why i have to depend upon you for my livelihood
why the stress from you shortens my lifespan
why i have little hope and few windows of promise
why i have no religion to call my own
why my voice has no merit

why i have no significant power
why i am still cannon fodder in all your wars
why i am still body parts for your research
why i am still your saturday night amusement
why i am not your sunday morning church companion
why i am still a victim of your willfull genocide
why you test my integrity and challenge my credibility
steal my culture and kill my spirit
don't ask me to explain why
you've had 400 years of explanations

you have stifled and ignored what i have said
marginalized my accomplishments
kept me invisible all these wasted years
even knocked the nose off my sphinx
to feed your euro-centric vanity
so don't ask me why anymore
why all is still the same
why the anger remains
i am still here and hopelessness has a way
of getting comfortable after 400 years
that's why
the fire next time

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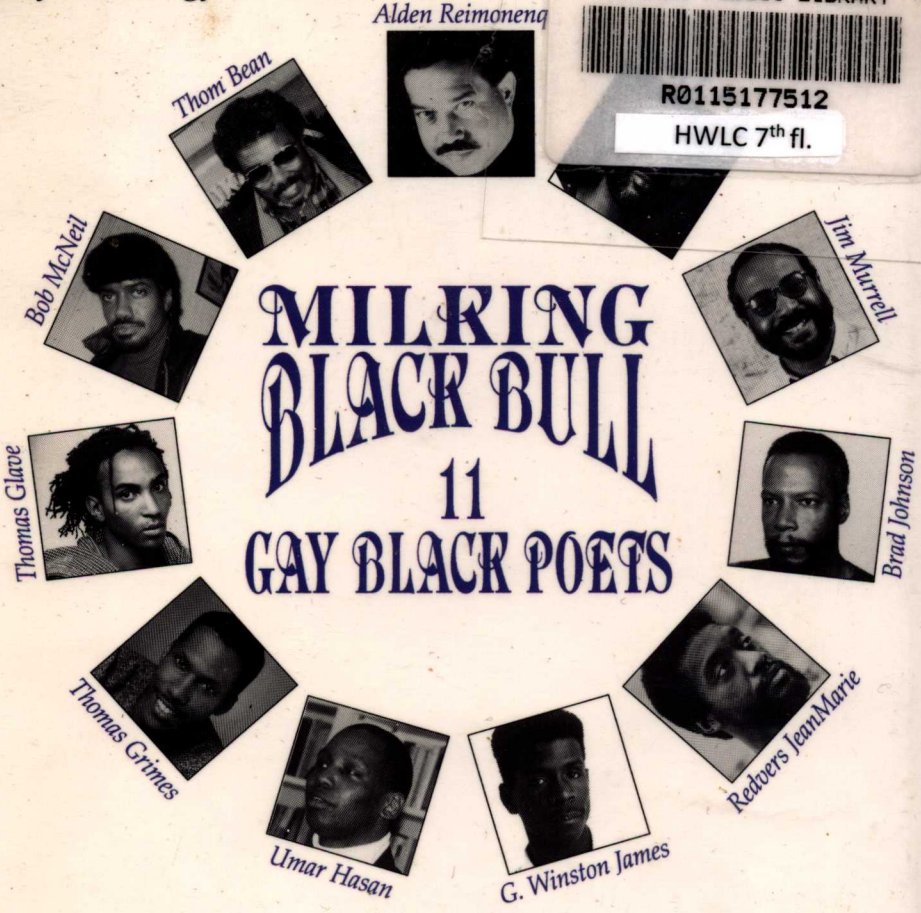

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